

VZCZCXRO3273  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #0827/01 1201320  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 301320Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1481  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000827

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PROTESTS STAGNANT - SIGNS OF DESPERATION  
INCREASING

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Protests continued on Wednesday, April 29 although only about 2000-3000 attended, a number of who appeared to be onlookers enjoying a nice day rather than dedicated supporters. Protest leaders have vowed to continue, but have not articulated a concrete plan. GOG representatives have privately been in contact with Irakli Alasania (Alliance) in an attempt to arrange a meeting to negotiate a way to end the protests. It appears a meeting may take place on April 30. More and more Georgian voices are openly questioning the motives of those leading the protests. An ever more confident President Saakashvili issued a statement calling the protests a very useful political cleansing process allowing Georgians to fully understand their choices. An April 30 meeting between EU resident Ambassadors (including the U.S.) and opposition members to clarify events did anything but and quickly devolved into Salome Zourabichvili and Nino Burjanadze chastising the Ambassadors for their ignorance and inability to understand their roles. An Alliance activist admitted that he had staged a "beating", and burned his car, in order to accuse the government of attacks against the opposition, although members of his party argued that he had confessed to doing this after being held for 8 hours by the police without an attorney present. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: The non-parliamentary opposition continues to be on the defensive with both political commentators and the general public becoming increasingly critical of their actions. In response to meager crowds and criticisms, the non-parliamentary opposition has chosen to heat up its rhetoric whereas the GoG appears content to let the non-parliamentary opposition further discredit itself. We will continue to push for dialogue and also to caution the non-parliamentary leaders to avoid further exacerbating the situation. End Comment.

Protests Stagnant - Saakashvili Confident

¶3. (C) The protests on Wednesday, April 29 attracted 1500 according to MOIA numbers, although Embassy observers put the number closer to 2000-3000. Central streets remain blocked; the Prime Minister convened the weekly government meeting on April 29 in the western city of Kutaisi. Trash and human excrement are noticeable around the protest area and further damaging to public perceptions; a website myvideo.ge has footage showing a number of protesters in the "cells" taking narcotics. Media outlets are beginning to report on drug use at the rallies as well. No coherent strategy has emerged in the last few days. Singer Utsnobi (Giorgi Gachechiladze and brother of protest leader Levan Gachechiladze) has indicated he might lead a march across the country. Others have put forth the idea of constructing cell cities in provincial cities although all indications are the non-parliamentary opposition has no clear strategy as to what to do next. Some statements have been made indicating a willingness to listen to the GoG's ideas for a way out of the crisis, but in the same breath opposition leaders often insist that the only solution is Saakashvili's resignation. Apart from calling

the protests a useful political cleansing process, Saakashvili said that Georgians do not care about the personal ambitions of politicians from the "center of Tbilisi". Saakashvili appears confident and in the driver's seat. He departed Tbilisi for Poland the evening of April 29 to participate in a meeting of the European People's Party. Qto participate in a meeting of the European People's Party.

#### EU Ambassador's Briefing Turns into Incoherent Angry Lecture

¶4. (C) The briefing for EU Ambassadors that was organized by the non-parliamentary opposition to "further explain their position" and clear up misperceptions did anything but convince those in attendance that the non-parliamentary opposition has a coherent plan or possibly even a concept of objective reality. (Embassy Note: The EU Ambassadors invited the Ambassador to attend as well, which he did. End Note.) The group was lead by Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), David Usupashvili (Alliance - Republicans), and Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) who did not speak at the event. Although Irakli Alasania was expected to participate, he did not attend. Nino Burjanadze started the meeting telling the Ambassadors that she would educate them on a number of misperceptions. The "education" consisted of a long tirade about how immoral, undemocratic, and unjust Saakashvili was. Burjanadze said that if Saakashvili is not removed from power now, he will become worse than Belarusian President Lukashenko. Burjanadze said that the non-parliamentary opposition had engaged in no violence; accused Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili (without citing any evidence) of deploying special forces against them; and even stated that she was a victim of a provocation because car

TBILISI 00000827 002 OF 003

windows were broken after her husband distributed bats to protesters (arguing that the MOIA and media inferred a link between the two events). Finally, after Burjanadze told the Ambassadors that Merabishvili was surveilling them, she stated they should refrain from saying the opposition had no plan or expressing the opinion that Saakashvili should not be removed from power via protests (she did not say how she knew they were discussing in private).

¶5. (C) Zourabichvili gave pointed comments to the group saving much of her venom for French Ambassador Eric Fournier who was not in attendance (he is currently in Paris at a conference). When asked a question about dialogue, she scolded EU Ambassadors for giving the non-parliamentary opposition advice, apparently forgetting the Ambassadors did not request the meeting. She went on to inform the Ambassadors that as a former diplomat she was troubled that they did not have an understanding as to how to do their jobs properly. The British Ambassador asked about their strategy; handing out baseball bats; intimidating the media; and the rights of the general citizenry being infringed by the protests. Usupashvili blamed the baseball bats and the protests on Saakashvili saying they needed to defend themselves and that Saakashvili left them no choice but to protest. All avoided answering the question on whether or not they had a plan. In fact, Usupashvili cited the lack of a coherent plan as a tribute to the democratic nature of the non-parliamentary opposition. When the Estonian Ambassador followed up about their willingness to negotiate only Saakashvili's resignation, Zourabichvili, Usupashvili, and Burjanadze took turns calling Saakashvili a liar. They said they would listen to the GoG's position "without preconditions," but will only negotiate Saakashvili's resignation and ruled out any "real" role for the Georgian Patriarch in mediation. Perhaps sensing the obvious irritation of most of the Ambassadors, Usupashvili interjected that they were reasonable people and would be open to allowing Saakashvili to resign in mid-May, after the NATO exercises. The Dutch Ambassador once again tried to ask the "plan" question only to be shouted down by Zourabichvili which prompted the Estonian Ambassador to ask aloud what the

point of the meeting was since they (pointing at the non-parliamentary opposition) refused to answer any questions. The EU Ambassadors demurred on Burjanadze's offer to meet twice a week to get more "accurate" information.

Misha Winning

¶6. (C) MP Peter Mamradze (officially unaffiliated, but a supporter of former PM Noghaideli) and former chief of Administration to ex-PM Zurab Zhvania and Noghaideli said the only thing the protests have done is make Saakashvili stronger. Mamradze said from the start the tactics used by the non-parliamentary opposition have only served to anger the public and discredit them as leaders. He said that a stronger Saakashvili is an unfortunate, though foreseeable outcome and that every day the protests continue, the stronger Saakashvili's position is. Mamradze (who took part in the first day's protest) said that right before and right after the April 9 protest, serious concessions could have been achieved, but the non-parliamentary opposition's sole focus on Saakashvili's resignation squandered its political leverage. Mamradze said he feared that an increasingly radical Burjanadze would lead her "clan" to take the Georgian Public Broadcaster building, saying he has been hearing that Burjanadze was considering this as a last gasp move. Mamradze likened the current opposition logic to a protest lead by former President Gamsakhurdia in 1991 against the Soviets. Gamsakhurdia organized Georgians to lie across rail tracks to block shipments from the Russian S.S.R. into the Georgian S.S.R. which would "bring the Kremlin to its knees". The result was that after two weeks, the Kremlin diverted the cargo for which the Georgians had already paid into North Ossetia where it was resold - the Georgians ended up with nothing and the Kremlin got double profits. Mamradze wryly noted that the non-parliamentary opposition was incapable of learning and that the protests meant to bring down Saakashvili have only served to strengthen him.

Signs of Movement from the Alasania Camp

¶7. (C) Mamradze said that Burjanadze views Alasania as her only potential rival in the non-parliamentary camp for the post of President. Mamradze indicated that Burjanadze was doing everything in her power to undermine him and had been fairly successful in lowering Alasania's standing both publicly and among the non-parliamentary opposition. The handshake with Saakashvili was a public indication that Alasania was considering making a move apart from the non-parliamentary group. Alasania confidante, and former Georgian Ambassador to Turkmenistan Alex Petriashvili told PolChief that they (Alasania's inner circle which does not

TBILISI 00000827 003 OF 003

include either David Usupashvili or David Gamkrelidze) were considering gains that could be achieved short of Saakashvili's resignation. Petriashvili said that one condition would be that any deal would have to include some element of negotiation with Saakashvili and some sort of joint announcement with Saakashvili. (Embassy Comment: Alasania might still have the leverage to negotiate directly with Saakashvili. At this point, only Alasania appears to be thinking about a negotiated solution out of the impasse. End Comment.) Petriashvili noted his own personal difficulties in working with David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights), and Alasania, who has always privately appeared lukewarm to both Gamkrelidze and Usupashvili, may be willing to break if he senses that the "Alliance" no longer suits his political purposes. Petriashvili said that any negotiated settlement would have to include protections for protesters from GoG reprisals.

Who is Provoking - Who Knows?

¶8. (C) Post has been following up on all publicized allegations of political intimidation. The recent allegation that an Alliance activist had been attacked and his car

burned might have been untrue. He admitted to staging a beating and burning his car, although his political colleagues argue that he was interrogated for eight hours by police without an attorney present before he made his confession. This follows a previous report that the Alliance had approached a citizen involved in a normal traffic stop and offered to compensate him if he claimed the stop was a MOIA provocation and political repression. Post does not rule out that certain groups or individuals have been using intimidation to suppress opposition voices; however, a number of other beatings have occurred with non-parliamentary leaders arriving almost immediately on the scene drawing suspicion as to the veracity of the claims. This could be an indication that the opposition is prepared to use increasingly desperate measures to draw the GoG into violence in order to rekindle public support.

TEFFT